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U.S. to Probe Leak of GAO's Israel Study

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 Washington Post Foreign Service

The Justice Department is to investigate whether federal espionage laws were violated when a pro-Arab lobbying organization published purportedly classified information contained in a General Accounting Office report on U.S. military assistance to Israel.

John Russell, spokesman for the Justice Department, said the agency's criminal division will "determine if there has been a violation of criminal statutes" by the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (known as the ADC), which earlier this month published an "uncensored" version of a GAO report outlining the amount of U.S. military assistance to Israel and policy considerations governing the aid.

In addition, Russell said the department is to determine whether any federal employee leaked a copy of the classified report to the pro-Arab group, thereby breaking restrictions on disclosure of government information.

While GAO officials and congressional sources dispute the overall accuracy of the ADC's publication, they have indicated that the group's report contains some classified information.

Rep. Lawrence Smith (D-Fla.) joined 10 other members of the House Judiciary Committee in a letter July 19 urging the Justice Department to "undertake immediately an investigation."

"I don't believe that there's any question that they released a preliminary draft" of the final GAO report, Smith said Wednesday.

Rep. Bill Green (R-N.Y.), in a letter yesterday to the attorney general, charged that the ADC "maliciously published fraudulent information in their report."

James Zogby, executive director of the ADC, said his group published the report because it wanted to spur debate on the question of U.S. aid to Israel and expose what he described as a gov-

ernmental bias toward the Jewish state. "The [uncensored] report is potentially embarrassing to Israel," he said, "but more embarrassing to whoever wielded the censoring pen and took the stuff out."

Zogby said he thinks the information was withheld from publication because it was damaging to

Israel—and not because it compromised U.S. national interests. Along these lines, a congressional aide said, "We're trying to find out why [the report] was classified . . . We're asking why were the deletions deleted." The aide requested that neither she or the member of Congress she works for be identified.

The GAO, which is the investigative and auditing arm of Congress, released on June 24 an 80-page, unclassified version of its report that focused on Israel's massive indebtedness to the United States as well as the political difficulties involved in altering the level and type of U.S. military assistance. The ADC then published its version, obtained, according to a spokesman, from an "unimpeachable source."

Sources indicated that the ADC's publication is a classified GAO draft that had been circulated for comment from executive agencies. A GAO spokeswoman refused to confirm or deny this.

The GAO released a statement July 11 saying it had "referred the documents and the circumstances in question to the Department of Justice for appropriate action." Russell said the Justice Department is waiting to receive the documents before beginning its inquiry.

Charlotte Jacobs, an aide to Green, said government officials do not view the publication of the classified information as particularly damaging. "The Department of Defense and State Department are more concerned about where the leak came from," she said.

The ADC publication, which its cover calls "The Uncensored Draft Report Prepared by the Staff of the U.S. General Accounting Office," con-

tains sentences and paragraphs set in bold type that were allegedly deleted for national security reasons from the final and unclassified version, plus occasional changes in wording and content in the non-deleted portions.

The new information and commentary supplied in the ADC report includes the following:

- While Israel views the Arab threat to its security as "grave," Defense Department officials "believe that [the threat] is overemphasized at this time."

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